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ALONE ON THE LINE

Monologues / Drama / 2-3 min
Cast 1 Male x1

It is 8:40 on a Friday night and the new kid has his apron off, halfway out the kitchen door. A line cook keeps six pans going while he tells him why he is not walking out tonight. The reason is a diner off the interstate and a man named Ray.

CHARACTERS

MARCUS - mid 20s, a line cook who has been in kitchens since he was nineteen and does not stop moving when he talks

SETTING

A busy restaurant kitchen, present day, Friday night in the middle of the dinner rush.

A restaurant kitchen, Friday night, 8:40. The ticket printer chatters. Steam, clatter, somebody yelling for hands. MARCUS, mid 20s, has a towel over his shoulder and six pans going. Near the back door, the new kid stands with his apron already off.

Marcus doesn't stop cooking while he talks.

MARCUS

Hey. Hey. Eli. Look at me, not the door. The door's not going anywhere.

You wanna quit. I get it. Table twelve sent it back twice, Danielle called you a word, you burned your hand on the salamander, and it's not even nine. That's a real night. I'm not gonna tell you it gets better, because it's Friday, and it's gonna get worse for like two more hours.

But you're not walking out tonight. And I'm gonna tell you why, and then you're gonna put the apron back on, or you're not, but you're gonna hear it.

He flips something. Plates it. Slides it to the window.

Hands!

First kitchen I ever worked, I was nineteen. Little diner off the interstate. There was a guy named Ray on the line. Sixty-something. Been there forever. Never said more than four words to me. And one Friday, same as this one, I got yelled at, I got burned, and I took my apron off and I walked out the back. Just like that. Middle of the rush. Didn't say a word to Ray. Left him alone with a full board.

(beat)

I felt great. For about a block.

Found out Monday he'd worked the whole night solo. Fourteen hours. And around midnight he went into the walk-in and sat down and didn't get up for a while, and the dishwasher found him. He was okay. Heart thing. He was okay.

He stops cooking for exactly one second.

But I didn't know he was okay till Monday. I had a whole weekend where I didn't know.

And I never went back. Never said sorry. He passed a couple years later and I read it online like a stranger.

Back to the pans.

So here's the thing. I'm not saying don't quit. This job's garbage, the money's garbage, Danielle is, honestly, a lot. You wanna quit, quit. Quit tomorrow. Quit at the end of the night when the board's clear and you can look me in the face and say it.

But you don't leave a guy alone on the line. That's it. That's the one rule I got.

(quieter)

And I'm not staying tonight for this place.
I stopped caring about this place a long
time ago.

I'm staying because you're here. Because I'm
not gonna be the guy who leaves you.

The ticket printer screams. He tears one off.

Two salmon, one steak mid-rare. Apron's on
the hook. Your call.

END OF SCRIPT